



# Free The Children in Ecuador

## PROGRAM BACKGROUND



Free The Children has been working in Ecuador since 1999. Our work has been focused in the province of Chimborazo. With the highest percentage of indigenous communities, Chimborazo faces one of the highest poverty rates in the country. Indigenous communities in Ecuador face a systematic discrimination, legacy of the country's Spanish colonization. Most of these communities now live close to mount Chimborazo at almost 4000m above sea level.

The communities main economic activity is agriculture and animal husbandry. However, the mountainous terrain tends to be dry, making farming challenging. Consequently, most of the time the family's revenues from these activities are not enough. Due to lack of local employment opportunities, men and young boys migrate to the bigger cities in search of work. The women and children are left behind in the community. The consequences of these absences range from family separation issues to economic downturns.

These communities have very limited access to education, water, income generation activities, and health care services. Children often have to walk

for hours to get to the nearest school. Additionally, many parents keep children at home instead of sending them to school to help with chores like fetching clean water or taking care of younger siblings while they work.

In response to these needs, Free The Children has engaged various Chimborazo communities to implement Adopt A Village, our holistic sustainable development model. Following this model, we work in partnership with these communities to eliminate the obstacles that prevent children from accessing education. Free The Children engages community members at every step of the projects to ensure the sustainability of each initiative.

Our team of community outreach and development workers consistently works with active women, men, and youth, empowering them to be the main creators of change in their own lives.

## ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

Free The Children was founded in 1995 by international child rights activist Craig Kielburger, when he was only 12 years old. Since, it has grown into the largest network of children helping children through education in the world. The primary goal of the organization is not only to free children from poverty and exploitation, but to also free young people from the idea that they are powerless to bring about positive social change and to improve the lives of their peers.

Free The Children is unlike any other children's charity in the world, as it is an organization by, of and for youth. Since 1995, over 1 million individuals from 45 countries have been inspired to become involved in its innovative, results-driven programs. The organization works on both an international and local level.

In the last 13 years, Free The Children has:

- Built and equipped 500 primary schools in 16 developing countries;
- Shipped \$10 million worth of medical supplies to children in need;
- Established nearly 2000 "Youth in Action" groups in 20 school boards across North America;
- Addressed over 250,000 youth through leadership workshops and motivational speeches;
- Facilitated international volunteer trips for more than 1,000 youth leaders.

# ADOPT A VILLAGE IN ECUADOR



*The old classrooms in most of the communities are dilapidated and their structure poses a safety risk for students.*



*The new Free The Children classrooms are clean, bright rooms with the required furniture for a learning environment.*

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Access to education in the Chimborazo province is very limited. While in the past the government set some infrastructure in place, there are no funds for maintenance, so the buildings are extremely unsafe for students. Due to the isolated location of the communities, teachers often have to travel 4 to 6 hours per day to reach the schools. As a result classes are cut short. Another barrier to quality education is the language. The teachers speak and teach in Spanish while the majority of women in the communities only speak Kiwcha, the local dialect. Due to the language barrier and their own limited education, mothers cannot help their children with homework. In addition, there are no secondary schools nearby, so children's education usually stops after primary school.

To address these challenges Free The Children works diligently to build schools and repair existing structures to provide children with a clean and safe environment conducive to learning. We are also building a high school accessible to various communities, so children can continue their education without traveling for hours.

We have also established long standing partnerships with the ministry of bilingual education, the school's principals, and local community leaders to ensure that children have access to education in both Spanish and Kiwcha. In the near future, Free The Children is also looking to implement after school programs to increase the quality of the education. These programs will complement the current subjects taught at school.



*Most communities lack proper sanitation facilities, which results in the spread of various diseases among community members.*



*Through our water and sanitation programs we work towards providing children with safe water and teach them essential sanitation practices.*

## WATER AND SANITATION PROGRAMMING

For the communities of Chimborazo, accessing safe drinking water is a challenging task. Many communities have a main piping system that provides limited water to the community. However, due to the nature of the terrain, homes are far apart, which means that girls often have to walk for over an hour to collect water from the only communal water source. While the quality of the water is fairly good, when carrying the water people tend to use containers that are dirty and so disease is spread through the containers rather than the water. Adding to this, the lack of sanitation systems is a main concern for community members' health. The local schools do not have toilets and there is no garbage collection system, which creates an unsanitary environment for all.

Free The Children staff is working diligently to provide these communities with clean water projects and accessible sanitation systems. We are working to equip schools with direct water piping, toilets and hand-washing stations. As the schools are centrally located, all community members will have access to these services. In addition, we are working in partnership with teachers to set up sanitation workshops to educate children regarding important hygiene and sanitation practices. The purpose of these workshops is to help students and community members understand the connection between sanitation and health.



# ADOPT A VILLAGE IN ECUADOR



*This is one of the local school kitchens. Women cook with an open fire, so the lack of windows and straw roofs constitute great health and safety concerns.*



*By providing students with a nutritious lunch, we ensure that they have the energy required to pay attention in class.*

## HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMMING

In the communities of Chimborazo the main health concerns are related to the lack of sanitation systems and poor nutrition. The diet of most people are based on the crops they harvest which consist of corn, rice, potatoes, and various grains. Fruits are rare and meat is a luxury to be had only on very special occasions such as marriages. Due to the difficult terrain and high altitude, only a limited number of crops can grow making agriculture a challenging task. As a result, most people only eat one or two meals a day, resulting in permanent malnutrition and stunted growth for children. When hungry, children have a hard time paying attention in school and their grades fall.

The Free The Children team is implementing several initiatives to overcome these challenges; the construction of a school kitchen and dining hall, as well as the institution of a lunch program. Working in close partnership with the women in the communities, we will be able to provide the students with a nutritious lunch. The mothers in the community will participate in a kitchen committee that will take turns cooking for the entire student population.

We are also looking to host capacity building workshops for the women on food preparation and nutrition. These workshops will teach women the value of a balanced meal and how to achieve this with minimal resources. The workshops will also cover the importance of hygiene and sanitary practices during food preparation.

In addition, we work with students, parents, and community leaders to set up community gardens. These plots have a dual purpose:

1. They act as demonstrational gardens which showcase best agricultural practices to all community members and,
2. They provide the required vegetables and fruits to supplement our lunch program for the local schools.

The active involvement of community members in all our projects ensures the sustainability of the initiatives.

## Free The Children: *Making a Difference*

Your support is crucial to maintain these initiatives:

- A new high school that will service children in surrounding communities
- Several classrooms, a school kitchen and dining hall
- New water systems and latrines
- Community gardens

If you would like to support a community in Ecuador, please donate online at:

[www.freethechildren.com/donate](http://www.freethechildren.com/donate)

To obtain further information please email:

[projects@freethechildren.com](mailto:projects@freethechildren.com)